

**W. H. FREEMAN AND COMPANY**  **PUBLISHERS**

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Dr. Joshua Lederberg  
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Dear Joshua:

I shall try to reply to your letter by thinking out loud on paper about the Genetics and Chemotherapy. Bear in mind as you read on that three pressures are on me. From one side, there push me the appointments attendant upon the AAAS, an annual orgy of meetings I do not favor, but which this year are so close to us that I cannot avoid them! From a second quarter--leading me to wonder whether I have entered into my second childhood--comes a complex of bodily afflictions, including, of all things, a sty in my eye, a frog in my throat, and the attendant sniffles that I have kept telling my children to avoid getting. Third, there is the fundamental fact that we have not made hard and fast decisions about the handling of your book, should we be so fortunate as to be its publisher, nor can we until we have the gem in hand to show us the specific problems it may present. However, the following I can tell you.

First, we are interested in this specific book for four reasons. One of them is Joshua Lederberg. The second is our general interest in genetics. The third is the pertinence of the subject to present needs. Fourth is the fact that the book is small, monographic, if you will.

In addition, we have an idea that there are many important facets of knowledge that should be made available in book form to scientists in general. We think that none or few of these may be big sellers in the usual sense. But we feel that, with proper procedures for handling them, many more such items could be made available at low prices. We hope to establish a publishing environment that encourages the writing--and, of course, submission to us--of small books, each with its own beauty or real excuse for being. Many of the problems of publishing such books and establishing such an environment for them we have not worked out and can do so only with specific manuscripts in hand. Hence I cannot give you specific answers on all questions, since no one has yet found them. I can tell you that the manuscript under discussion seems to us a very good opportunity to try to work out the answers to these problems.

As to format: We will not publish any book that is not

distinctive and attractive in format. With a genius like Stan Schaefer and his assistants, there is no question in my mind about the possibility of doing something distinctively attractive. You have seen enough of our other books to know what we want in this respect. Many of our competitors do most of their books in sound typographical form. In other words, it is merely a matter of taste, and we feel that most of them are needlessly mundane or drab, just as we feel that ours are not. I trust you agree with me on this point. To give you an example of the techniques involved, we will not use Modern 8A, a very sound type but a boring one by contrast with Caledonia or Baskerville. The book, in other words, we want to be a small thing, though not pocket size, with physical beauty.

As to price: Again I cannot give you a definite answer, but I can tell you that the extremes of my thinking have been \$2.50 and \$3.50. I should like these books to be priced at \$2.50, but expect they will have to be either \$2.75 or \$3.00 (anything over \$3.00 would defeat one of my major goals and would be acceptable to us only under extreme conditions). This whole business of price, Joshua, is a very involved one. And to illustrate my point that, if I am to be honest with you, I cannot give you an exact answer, I discuss in a superficial way some of the factors that determine price.

First, bear in mind that the list price that a purchaser pays in a bookstore is not the price that a publisher works on. He must work on the net price--that is, the one the bookstore pays him. For example, if a book is given a list price of \$3.00, that may mean one of two prices in terms of what the publisher gets. If the discount is 20%, it means that the publisher gets \$2.40 for a copy of the book; if it is a long-discount item, the bookstore gets 40% of the list price of \$3.00, and the publisher 60%, or \$1.80. Our current thinking here is that we will hold these books to a 20% discount and hope to bypass the overly expensive bookstores, selling for the most part by mail and directly to the consumer. In this way we feel we can give the reader a better buy. However, I should like you to realize this current decision is not hard and fast, and we want to be free to make, at the proper time, what seems to us the proper decision.

What factors determine the net price that a publisher must ask for a book? There are too many to discuss, but there are some especially important ones that I will comment on briefly for you. First, there is manufacturing cost. In the case of your manuscript, this is not the major and controlling one, as it so often is. As I suggested earlier, we could stay within the price range we desire were your book to be

192 rather than 160 pages--indeed, could do this more readily were there greatly added value to the book because of the added 32 pages. The next factor in pricing a book is royalty, for it is part of any publisher's formula that he should hope, on a successful book, to make as much profit as he pays out in royalty. In short, this means that the royalty we offer you must be doubled, to explain to you the importance of this factor in pricing a book. We will not make as much as we pay out in royalty if the book sells less well than we expect, so that it is necessary for a publisher to have this potential margin of profit, which would be completely wiped out, of course, if the book sold only seven-eighths as well as the editor hoped it would.

What sale may be envisioned for your book? Here again any publisher is torn between his optimism, which leads him to estimate sales liberally, and his experience, which tells him to be more cautious. All the estimates we have had tell us that your book will sell somewhere between 3,000 and 6,000 copies, that it will probably be out of date or need a revision in about four years. We will figure, then, on breaking even on a sale of about 4,000 copies, though our first printing will probably be smaller than that (partly for reasons of safety, but partly also to catch in a reasonably early reprint any of those insidious errors that will creep into the best edited of books).

A major cost factor in such a title as this is the simple expense of "handling" a copy of the book. You will have noticed that such fine houses as Academic Press seem to charge very high prices per volume. This is because their average sale is for only one copy, or two copies. It costs just as much to fill the order for one copy as it does for one thousand copies--indeed, it sometimes costs more to sell one copy of, say, Pauling than it does to sell five hundred copies, for the credit rating of the organization buying five hundred is already established, and they are apt to pay promptly, where the individual who buys a copy is more of a risk and slower to pay. We have decided that these small, inexpensive books we want to do can be handled in our organization during our less busy times of year. For example, textbooks occupy our billing department during July, August, September, and January. But during November, December, March, and April our billing department has little to do. We are prepared, therefore, to publish these small books so that the heavy initial billing and handling come in our slack months. And we are prepared to charge against these books less per volume shipped than we do against our big bread-and-butter sellers.

Another cost, however, that cannot be so written down is

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promotion. A journal ad for such a book costs just as much as it does for a freshman best seller. Indeed, it costs more, because there are so many more individuals who must be reached, whereas a publisher need only get the ear of approximately two thousand teachers to blanket the field for his freshman text. We do not have all the answers on the score of this cost. It will be the major cost factor in these books, whereas for others in our list manufacture and royalty are the major costs. All I can tell you on this item is that we are anxious to exercise our ingenuity.

Now, what may I have left unsaid? A great deal, I am sure--as I warned you I would have to. I trust, however, that this gives you a pretty good perspective of our thinking about the publishing of these small, inexpensive volumes, and most immediately of our thinking about your book if we are to publish it.

Happy New Year!

Sincerely yours,

*Bill Freeman*

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